

Lavelle School
Township Road 905
Main Street
Village of Lavelle
Butler
Schuylkill County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5441

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Mid-Atlantic Region
Department of the Interior
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LAVELLE SCHOOL

HABS No. PA-5441

Location: Township Road 905, Main Street, Village of Lavelle
Township of Butler, Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania

USGS "Mount Carmel, PA" Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 18.383501.4513190

Present Owner: Township of Butler
211 Broad Street
Fountain Springs
Ashland, Pennsylvania 17921

Present Occupant: Vacant

Significance: The Lavelle School is an attractive brick and wood frame structure with an impressive projecting tower on the north elevation, facing the street. Although much of its detailing is gone, some of its features remain to tell the story of the many generations of children who were educated there. Its architectural characteristics speak of the high level of concern given to education within the community and of the prime importance of the building within the village. Today, the building survives as the symbol of education in the village.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of Erection:** 1884
2. **Architect:** Unknown
3. **Original and Subsequent Owners:** The School District of Butler Township (from 1884 to 1964); the Township of Butler (from 1964 to present)
4. **Builder, Contractor, Suppliers:** Unknown
5. **Original Plans and Construction:** When the building was constructed in 1884, it consisted of the one story brick section of the north part only. One view, dated c.1900, shows the building as a one-story structure with a projecting center bay and bell tower. The view also shows shutters on the windows and a lack of fenestration on the side elevation. Above the entrance in the view is a bulls-eye window; on the roof, pole gutters pitch rain water away from the center tower outward toward the edges of the building. Surrounding the building in the view is a wood picket fence on the west side and a metal picket fence on the front (north) side. A copy of the view is included as part of this package.
6. **Alterations and Additions:** The first addition to the building occurred in 1898 with the construction of the rear addition. The building was again enlarged circa 1904 with the addition of the second floor and tower over the main building. Flush toilets and drinking fountains were added to the building in 1933 and two years later the furnace was installed.

- B. Historical Context:** The Village of Lavelle was first known as Salome, in honor of Salome Hepler Bolich, wife of Michael Bolich, a pioneer settler in the region during the mid nineteenth century. In 1869, Nathan Bolich (Michael's son) sold two lots along Main Street in Salome to the Butler Township School District and in 1873, the first school in the village was constructed. An 1875 Beers Map of the village shows the school near the east end of town on the north side of the street.

In 1884, the existing school building was built further west along the south side of Main Street to replace the original school. The new building (the subject of this report) was constructed on a 99' x 200' tract of land adjacent to similar tracts that were beginning to have houses constructed on them. This part of the village became known as Rocktown as it developed. Eventually, the names Salome and Rocktown gave way to that of Lavelle, in honor of Martin Lavelle, Esquire, district attorney and criminal lawyer of Schuylkill County.

From its earliest days, the new Lavelle School was crowded with children and it received major additions on two separate occasions - in 1898 and c.1904. The Lavelle School, as it

was gradually called, housed grades K through 4 on the first floor and grades 5 through 8 on the second floor (see floor plans on page 11). According to one retired teacher, Mrs. Helen Gradwell of Locustdale, PA, the school had electric lights prior to 1930; however, she remembered each classroom having a coal stove that required stoking every day during the winter before the central furnace was installed.

Mrs. Gradwell reported that her uncle, Mr. Ronald Kehler, taught classes upstairs at Lavelle School for many years; she said that he was also the principal of the school. "No fancy big office for him" she reported; "he had to work twice as hard being a teacher too." Mrs. Gradwell also said that she commuted to Lavelle every day with Mr. Kehler and several other teachers from their homes in Locustdale, several miles to the north.

The Lavelle School was used until the construction of a new elementary school several miles east of the village in 1964. At that time, the Lavelle School was sold to the Township of Butler for one dollar; the building was then converted into a community center for social activities in the village.

Usage and maintenance of the building declined into the 1970s and eventually its use as a community center declined. During the early 1980s, it was leased to an auto parts store for storage but by 1984, it was closed up for safety reasons by the Township.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural Character:** built in a predominantly residential neighborhood, the Lavelle School is the educational focus of the Village. Its two story brick and wood sided exterior is ornately contrasted by its shingled, projecting front tower.
2. **Condition of Fabric:** the structural system is basically sound; however, the roof is damaged and the lack of periodic maintenance has caused the finishes in the building to become deteriorated. Most of the decorative features and elements have been removed or destroyed by vandalism or lack of maintenance.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall Dimensions:** the two-story, brick and shingle sided, seven bay wide school building has an unfinished basement and a one story projecting brick addition attached to the front (north elevation). In the rear (south side), a one-story, gabled, wood frame addition with a full basement is connected to the main building with a one-story, wood frame hyphen. Centered in the front above the projecting brick addition is a single-bay width tower with a pyramidal roof.

The main part of the building is 60'-0" wide by 35'-2" deep; the addition is 30'-3" wide by 36'-0" deep.

2. **Foundations:** locally quarried sedimentary stone and sandstone, random laid, 2'-0" thick, pointed with raised joints
3. **Walls:** running bond, salmon-colored, brick exterior walls, 14" thick on first floor of main building; wood shingles with decorative shingle coursing on second floor of main building; wood clapboard on hyphen and rear addition
4. **Structural System, Framing:** 3" x 10" circular sawn wood joists @ 16" spacing spanning north-south across 6" x 10" wood beams in the center of floors 1 and 2 of the main building; similar sized joists at similar spacing spanning east-west across a similar sized wood beam in the center of the rear addition; the attics of main building and rear addition were both inaccessible so attic joists and rafter sizes and spacing could not be determined
5. **Porches, Stoops, Balconies, Bulkheads:** front porch is recessed into a one-story brick addition in front (north elevation); concrete stoop in front; no balconies or bulkheads
6. **Chimneys:** brick chimneys attached to the exterior planes of the east and west walls of the main building, and to the west wall of the rear addition
7. **Openings:**
 - a. **Doorways and Doors:** main entrance on front (north) elevation - a pair of three-panel/four light door leaves with a glazed, elliptical transom; east and west sides of hyphens - single, two panel/four light leaves; west side of rear addition - a pair of four panel/four light door leaves; south side of rear addition - a modern four light roll-up garage door

All doorways are wood frame

- b. **Windows and Shutters:** main building first floor - 4/4 double-hung units with wood sills and elliptical-arch lintels composed of a rowlock course of brick; main building second floor - 4/4 double-hung units with wood sills and trim; rear addition basement windows - 2/2 double-hung units with wood sills and trim; rear addition first floor windows - 4/4 paired double-hung units with wood sills and trim and decorative heads; bathroom addition at the hyphen - 6/6 double-hung units with wood sills and trim

No evidence of shutters or shutter hardware remains

8. Roof:

- a. **Shape, Covering:** Main building - hipped roof with slate shingles; rear addition - gable roof with asphalt shingles; hyphen - flat roof with built-up membrane
- b. **Cornice, Eaves:** Main building - bracketed wood cornice; rear addition - built-up wood cornice; hyphen - wood cornice
- c. **Dormers, Cupolas, Towers:** tower has a hipped roof with slate shingles and a bracketed wood cornice; it has circular-shaped openings on each elevation with balusters and decorative railings as infill in the openings

There are no dormers or cupolas

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

- a. **Basement:** Main building and hyphen - a large space with a dirt floor; rear addition - a large space with a concrete floor used for equipment storage
- b. **First Floor:** Main building - two large, airy classrooms on either side of a center stairhall with two bathrooms and a vestibule in the front addition; rear addition - one large, airy classroom; hyphen - a connecting hallway with a side entrance and two bathrooms and a kitchen
- c. **Second Floor:** Main building - two large, airy classrooms on either side of the center stairhall with two sets of closets in the front (north side)

- 2. Stairways:** wood stairway with wood wainscot in center stairhall; roughly three feet in width from the first floor up to a landing midway between the floors; then full width of stairhall (roughly 7'-0") from landing up to the second floor; solid wood railing

Metal fire escape at rear (south side) of main building

- 3. Flooring:** wood 2 1/4" modern pine tongue & groove flooring, laid diagonally throughout the first floor and east-west on the second floor
- 4. Wall and Ceiling Finish:** walls are plaster with vertical beaded wainscot rising 3'-0" on first floor and 4'-0" on second floor; three of the four walls of every classroom had chalk boards (the frames still exist but the chalk boards themselves have been

removed) - only the rear wall of each classroom did not have chalk boards

Ceilings are plaster

5. **Openings:**

a. **Doorways and Doors:** doors generally missing except two four-light leaves on second floor; doorways contain six-light transoms

b. **Windows:** wood sills and casings, no aprons

6. **Decorative Features and Trim:** none

7. **Hardware:** some original doors still contain bronzed locks, knobs, and escutcheons; most of the features have been removed

Windows have bronzed thumb latches and no pulls

8. **Mechanical Equipment:**

a. **Heating, Air Conditioning, Ventilation:** remnants of a hot water (or steam) system that fed individual air handling units or radiators in each classroom

b. **Lighting:** ceiling mounted single bulb incandescent fixtures - four per classroom with a fifth unit above the teacher's desk in each classroom

c. **Plumbing:** remnants of a modern plumbing system with fixtures still intact; location of septic system or sewer unknown

D. **Site:**

1. **General Setting and Orientation:** building faces north and is situated roughly 40 feet from south side of Main Street; the site slopes into the building and is approximately 99' x 200' with a steep embankment down at the rear of the site. The yard on the south side of the building was used as a play area and was probably composed of dirt and cinders. Today, it is grass.

2. **Historic Landscape Design:** no historic treatments

3. **Outbuildings:** none

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. **Original Architectural Drawings:** None known

- B. Early Views:** two post cards found by former Lavelle Postmaster Helen Edling, of Lavelle (copies are included as part of this package)
- C. Interviews:** Telephone interviews on July 20, 1989 and August 3, 1989 between John R. Bowie and:
1. Mrs. Helen Gradwell, age 84, of Locustdale, PA - retired teacher (she taught art, and 5th and 6th grades for 41 years at Lavelle School and other schools in Butler Township)
 2. Mrs. Catherine Kelly, age 73, of Locustdale, PA - retired teacher (she taught kindergarten and first grade for 35 3/4 years at Lavelle School and other schools in Butler Township)
 3. Dr. Charles Greco, Superintendent of the North Schuylkill Consolidated School District - Dr. Greco reported that all local school districts in the northern part of Schuylkill County were gradually merged into a large, consolidated district during the 1970s. He indicated that at that time, records of the individual districts (including the Butler Township School District) were either destroyed or lost. At this date, none have been found; it is assumed they were destroyed.
- D. Bibliography:**
1. **Primary and Unpublished Sources:**
 - a. "The History of Lavelle", an unpublished collection of interviews and notes assembled and written by former Lavelle Postmaster Helen Edling of Lavelle in 1957 and typed in December 1986 by Gail Heyer; found in the Historical Reference File at the Ashland Public Library, Ashland, PA.

This collection of papers contains reminiscences from Lavelle residents about interesting pieces of the village's history.
 - b. Deeds and Mortgages found in the Offices of the Recorder of Deeds and the Prothonotary at the Schuylkill County Courthouse in Pottsville, PA
 - i. DB 1061, pg. 204, 11-16-1964, Butler Twp. School District to Twp. of Butler for \$1.00 (no references to previous entries in the title chain were listed on the deed, nor were any references to either party found in the Grantors/Grantees Indexes)
 - ii. DB 1132, pg. 566, 12-4-1970, Frank and Jennie Banning to Asher Banning (this is the tract adjacent to the school property on the west side; its metes & bounds refer to the adjacent tract of the Butler Township School District)

- iii. DB 661, pg. 344, 4-2-1945, Amelia Banning, widow, to Frank and Jennie Banning for \$1.00 (the adjacent school property is mentioned in the metes & bounds)
- iv. DB 534, pg. 331, 12-21-1925, Curtis A. Banning to John A. Banning and Amelia Banning, his wife for \$1.00 (the adjacent school property is mentioned in the metes & bounds)
- v. DB 534, pg. 330, 12-21-1925, John A. Banning and Amelia, his wife, to Curtis A. Banning, for \$1.00 (the adjacent school property is mentioned in the metes & bounds)
- vi. DB 325, pg. 105, 6-1-1905, Thomas E. Enterlein and Estella, his wife, to John A. Banning, for \$500.00 (the adjacent school property is mentioned in the metes & bounds)
- vii. Sheriff's DB 10, pg. 400, 1-15-1894, Joseph Woll, High Sheriff of Schuylkill County to Thomas E. Enterlein and Stella, his wife, for \$215.00, reference Writ of Fieri Facias in Court of Common Pleas, 11-23-1893 where John Stehr is listed as owing \$1,498.00 (the adjacent school property is mentioned in the metes & bounds)
- viii. DB 178, pg. 297, 2-3-1885, Locust Mountain Savings & Loan Association, Ashland, PA, to John Stehr for \$504.81 (the adjacent school property is not mentioned in the metes & bounds)
- ix. DB 539, pg. 257, 3-30-1929, Thomas E. Enterlein to Russell E. and Helen I. Enterlein, (this is the tract adjacent to the school property on the east side; its metes & bounds refer to the adjacent tract of the Butler Township School District)
- x. DB 368, pg. 54, 12-12-1906, George E. Enterlein and F. Y. Weidenhammer, Elders of the Church of God at Lavelle and their Successors in Office in Trust for the East Pennsylvania Eldership of the Church of God, to Thomas E. Enterlein for \$50.00 (the adjacent school property is mentioned in the metes & bounds)
- xi. DB 204, pg. 545, 1-26-1888, Mary Young of Locust Dale to George E. Enterlein and F. Y. Weidenhammer, Elders of the Church of God at Lavelle and their Successors in Office in Trust for the East Pennsylvania Eldership of the Church of God, for \$100.00 (the adjacent school property is not mentioned in the metes & bounds)

- xii. DB 111, pg. 460, 8-5-1869, Nathan Bolich to Butler Township School District (this was the original village school, located on East Main Street, that was replaced by the Lavelle School in 1884)
- c. Maps and Atlases
 - i. 1875 Beers Map of Butler Township, found in the Law Library of the Schuylkill County Courthouse, in Pottsville, PA (shows the 1873 school building only)

2. Secondary and Published Sources:

- a. Joseph Henry Zerbey, History of Pottsville and Schuylkill County, Vol. II, 1934, pg. 640
- b. Adolph W. Schalck, History of Schuylkill County, Vol. 1, 1907, pg. 195
- c. W.W. Munsell and Company's History of Schuylkill County, 1881

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

- a. Deeds and Mortgages earlier than +/- 1880 for the two properties adjacent to the Lavelle School to see if they were subdivided from a larger parcel

F. Supplemental Material:

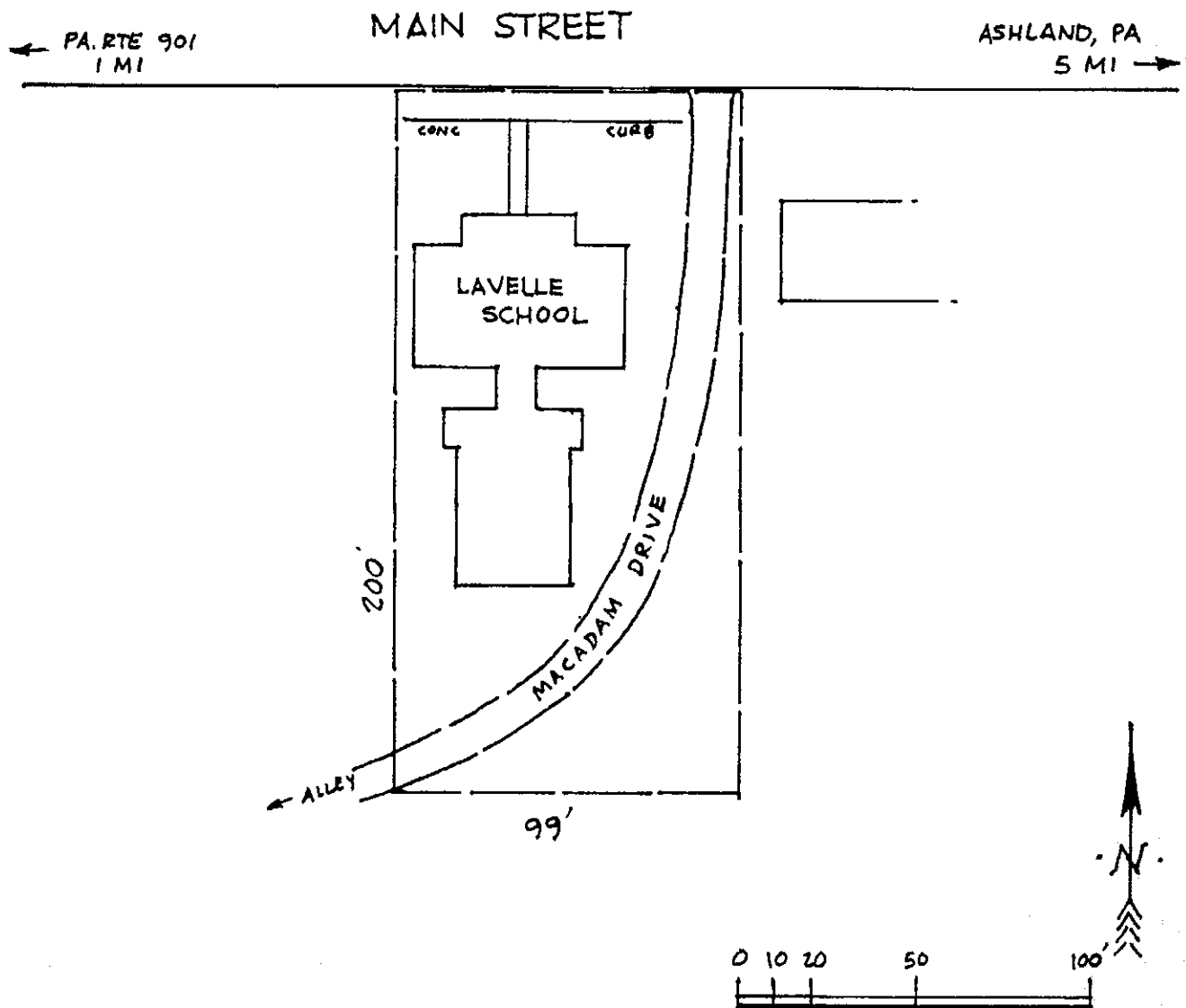
- a. As a postscript, on October 30, 1989, Mrs. Emily Hummel of Beury's Grove, PA (near Ashland, PA) reported that she was born in 1918 and attended the Lavelle School from grades 1 through 8. She graciously provided insights as to which grades were taught in which rooms of the building.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken as part of the requirements of a Memorandum of Agreement between the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, and the Board of Supervisors of the Township of Butler. Upon completion of this documentation project, the building will be demolished.

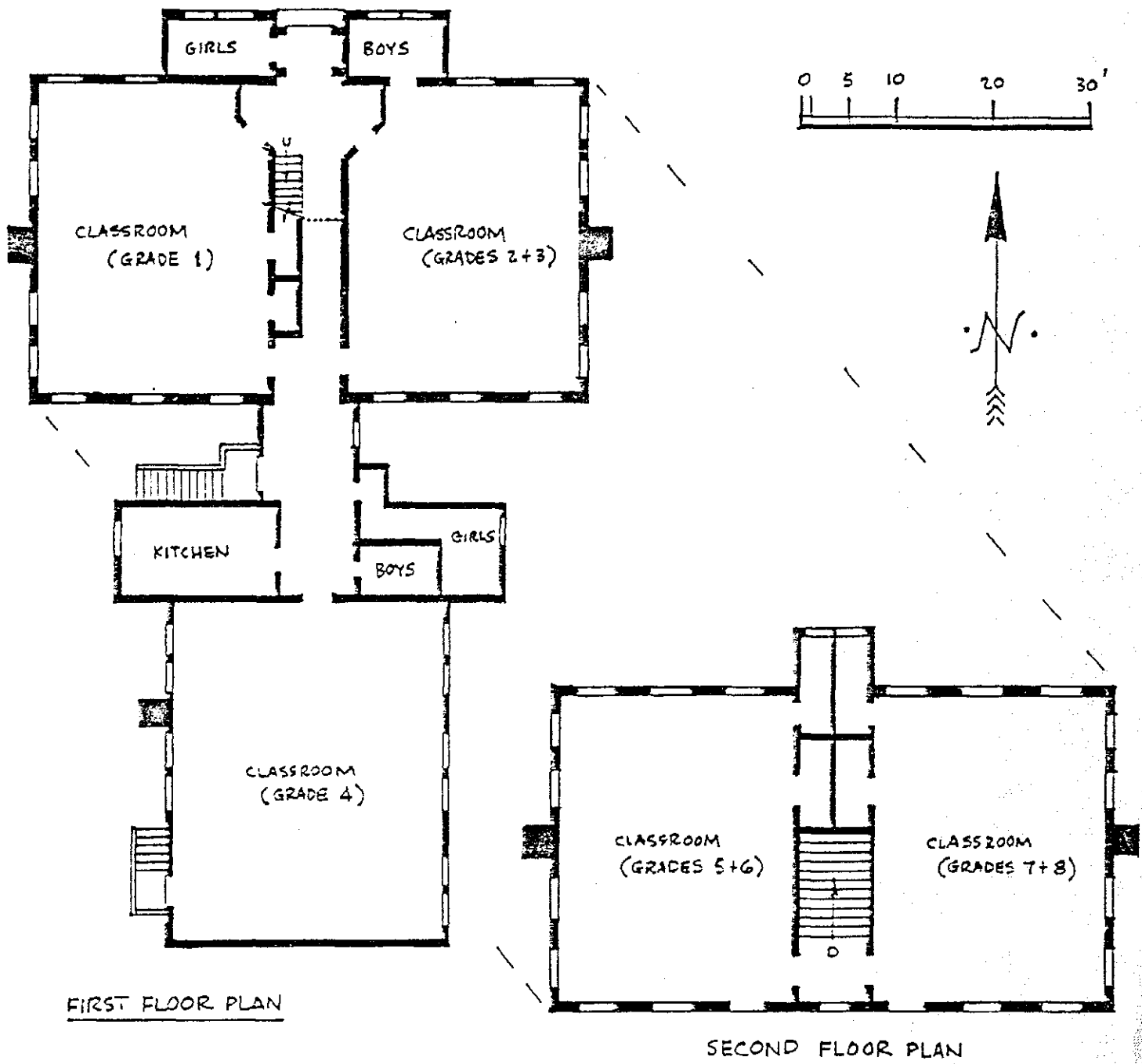
This documentation was prepared by John Bowie Associates, Architects, of Media, Pennsylvania, in July 1989. The large-format photography was conducted by A. Pierce Bounds, Photographer; the historical report was prepared by John R. Bowie, A.I.A.

SITE PLAN OF THE LAVELLE SCHOOL



Information on this drawing taken from Site Survey prepared by Ronald R. Dillman, R.L.A., of Prodesign Plus, Inc. of Frackville, PA (no date)

BUILDING SKETCH PLANS OF THE LAVELLE SCHOOL



Information on this drawing taken from "Existing Floor Plans" prepared by Ronald R. Dillman, R.L.A., of Prodesign Plus, Inc. of Frackville, PA (December 1988)